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ADDRESS

OF THE

YEARLY MEETING

OF THE

RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS,

HELD IN

THE CITY OF NEW YORK,

IN THE

SIXTH MONTH, 1852,

TO THE

PROFESSORS OF CHRISTIANITY

IN THE

UNITED STATES.

NEW YORK:

R. CRAIGHEAD, PRINTER, 53 VESEY STREET.

1852.

PR

A D D R E S S .

The religious Society of Friends is known to the community as a people entertaining a conscientious conviction of the incompatibility of Slavery with the spirit and precepts of the Gospel; and under this conviction they have at different times appeared before the public in advocacy of the cause of liberty as the inalienable right of all men.

We feel engaged once more to invite the attention of our fellow-citizens—professors of the benign religion of Jesus Christ, whose office it was prophetically declared should be “to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound,” to a serious consideration of this subject.

There can be no doubt that the Church of Christ is designed to occupy a very elevated position as relates to purity and uprightness, and to exert through its teaching and example a purifying influence in the world; that the members of it should be distinguished by a scrupulous observance of the moral and social duties, agreeably to the language of prophecy—“He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?”

Our Holy Redeemer, in his public ministrations while on the earth, was engaged impressively to set before his followers the high position in which they were to stand.

and the weight of responsibility that would rest upon them. "Ye are the light of the world," said he. "A city that is set upon a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your father which is in Heaven."

It becomes then a very interesting inquiry, whether the Christian Church, in the present day, does indeed stand in that elevated position, which is represented by the figure of "a city that is set on a hill?" Whether the light which it diffuses is of that pure and holy character, that will induce others to glorify our "Father which is in Heaven?"

If such an inquiry, scrupulously conducted, can leave on our minds the impression that the members of the Christian Church are in such a state that it may be truly said of them, in the language of the Apostle, that they "walk as children of light, proving what is acceptable unto the Lord, and have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness," then may we be comforted in the hope that the blessing of the Lord will rest upon the Church, and upon our beloved country for its sake. For we are instructed by the highest authority to believe that the members of the Church, if standing in their proper allotments, "are the salt of the earth."

But, if the proposed review should result in the conviction that the Church, in the present day, has, in some degree, fallen below the standing of its bright original; and that practices at variance with the principles of *justice* and *mercy* are tolerated in it; then is there not cause that it should be earnestly engaged to return to its first love, and to do its first works?

We are aware of the sensitive state of feeling respecting the subject of slavery. It is our desire not to arouse

angry discussion, nor to array on section of our country in hostile feeling against another. But in all soberness we would treat the subject as a question of right, and as in the presence of Him who is to be our judge, and who has solemnly forewarned us, that he will regard the withholding of deeds of mercy from even the lowest of our fellow beings, as being withheld from himself. "Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me."

It will readily be admitted that all who take upon them the name of Christ are called to "depart from iniquity,"—and that the declaration, "Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people," is language full of truth. The Deity is represented in the Holy Scriptures as a Being infinite in power and wisdom, and perfect in justice, mercy, and love. The nature of man, his relation and responsibility to his Creator, and his duties to his fellow creatures, are also clearly defined therein. We are told that man was made in the image of God; that although finite in knowledge, and limited in power, he is called to imitate the Divine attributes in deeds of justice and mercy, and in works of love; that though the image of his Creator has been lost by transgression, it may be restored through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and by obedience to his precepts.

Of the precepts uttered by Him, the following has been distinguished by the appellation of "the golden rule:"—"Therefore, all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them, for this is the law and the prophets."

Now, if we compare the practice of enslaving our fellow men with this rule, and try it by this test, it is evident that the unhesitating verdict of conscience must be against it. If brought to bear upon ourselves and our posterity, we should certainly regard it as the greatest

possible calamity—an act of oppression too heavy to be borne. And if we judge thus in our own case, by what rule as Christians should we judge in the case of others? We are warned in the sacred Scriptures against allowing our judgment to be warped by considerations of self-interest or popularity. “Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil; neither shalt thou speak in a cause to decline after many to wrest judgment.”

That all mankind are the descendants of a common ancestor; that God “hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth;” and that He is no respecter of persons, are truths prominently set forth in Holy Writ: and they appear to have been fully recognized in the Declaration on which our form of government claims to be based,—that all men are created equal; that they are endowed with certain inalienable *rights*; and that among these are, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Happy, indeed, would it have been for our beloved country had these immutable principles been fully carried into practice. It appears strikingly inconsistent that our free form of government, and its liberal institutions, should be linked with slavery; and there is the plainest evidence that they do not harmonize. If we trace to their source the dissensions which have disturbed the tranquillity of our government, and even threatened its dissolution, it will be obvious to all that slavery has been a fruitful source of those troubles.

Amongst the measures latterly adopted to allay the excitement, and remove the discontent existing in some portions of our country, was the enactment of the stringent law for the recovery of those who escape from bondage. The execution of this law has been attended with circumstances, from the contemplation of which humanity shrinks:—yet the discontent has not been allayed. But, we would seriously ask, has not an additional weight of

accountability, in the sight of our Omniscient Judge, been incurred ?

Patriotism in its purest form may lead us to regard every country as our country, and every man as our brother ; and may prompt the desire to promote the happiness of all, to enlighten the uninformed, to assist the needy, and to relieve the oppressed : and popular outbursts of this nature are not unfrequently manifested. But it belongs to religion to enlarge and perfect this generous feeling. Religion founds the sentiment, not alone on the circumstances of a common Creator, or common ancestry, but also upon the interesting truth, that all are alike objects of the love of a common Redeemer, who gave himself a ransom for all. He has taught us to regard him alone as our master, and that we are brethren, designed alike for a happy immortality, to be enjoyed in His holy presence.

Then how can Christians seize upon a portion of their fellow-men, consign them to a state of bondage that is to end only with their lives, shut out in a large measure the light of knowledge from their understanding, and reduce them to the state of chattels, to be bought and sold at the option of the master : thus severing the tenderest ties of human nature ? How can Christians do this, and still stand approved in the sight of that Gracious Being whose ear is open to the cries of the poor and the oppressed, and whom we acknowledge to be our Lord ?

To bring slavery to the test of the precepts of our Lord Jesus Christ, let us suppose ourselves, our children, our parents, our brothers and sisters, in the position of the slave. Let us ask ourselves what course of conduct we should, in this condition, desire and expect from the followers of Him who was sent "to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound ;" and who enjoined his disciples to do to others as

they would that others should do to them? Should we not expect that Christian freemen would raise their voices to plead our cause?—that Christian legislators would employ their power to loosen rather than strengthen our bonds?—that Christian masters would feel constrained to remove the heavy burden, break every yoke, and let the oppressed go free?

We speak of slavery as constituting a national sin; and when we reflect upon the millions of our fellow creatures who are subjected to the blighting influence, the subject assumes a magnitude that may well affect us with deep concern. It cannot be supposed that such is to be the permanently established state of things; and by what means a change is to be effected is among those fearful events which lie concealed in the unknown future. Would that the hearts of our countrymen could be inclined to seek out, and adopt measures tending to the peaceable extinction of this oppressive system!

It is true that slavery is confined to a section of our country, and is not under the control of the National Government; and it may therefore be thought that the responsibility must rest upon the section in which the institution is fostered. But permit us to ask if the statesman who expends his eloquence to rivet the chains of slavery, and to extend the area of it, and the citizen who supports that statesman, have no connection with the system? And to the members of our own body, in common with all who profess the benign religion of the Gospel, we would address the inquiries—Have the manufacturer and the merchant, to whom the products of slave labor furnish the material for a lucrative business, and the individual whose consumption of those products sustains the manufacturer and the merchant—have they no connection with slavery? It has been said, “Whoso gives the motive, makes his brother’s sin his own.” May we all

carefully examine the subject, and consider whether, while freely trading in and consuming the produce of slave labor, we are not indeed giving the motive, and do not become ourselves, in fact, a party to the system; and whether we shall be justified in the sight of Him who judgeth righteously, who is indeed a God of knowledge, and by whom actions are weighed?

We call upon the professors of Christianity throughout the length and breadth of our land seriously to consider in what manner, as followers of Christ, called by Him to be as the salt of the earth, the weight of their influence should be exerted for the removal of this great evil. It is a solemn thought that retribution is consistent with the attributes of the Deity. In sacred history we may trace the visitations of Divine displeasure upon a highly favored but revolting people, showing that God is indeed "terrible in his doing towards the children of men:" and these things are recorded for our warning.

We would respectfully invite those who claim to stand as pastors to the people, to reflect upon the importance of the station they occupy, and the weight of obligation resting upon them, faithfully to discharge the duty they have assumed, and cast the weight of their influence on the side of justice and freedom.

It is interesting to reflect upon the effect produced by the preaching of the Gospel in the primitive age of the Church, upon a people sunk in Pagan darkness and Pagan immorality—how, through the reforming influence of this ministry, they were drawn to forsake the evil of their ways, and to "walk in newness of life." And though these converts to the Christian faith were despised and persecuted, yet, unprotected by any earthly power, their numbers and their influence increased, until at length the towering institution of Paganism yielded to the force of truth.

And doubtless it was, and is, the design of the Great Head of the Church, that this Christian influence should prevail against every system, the tendency of which is to obstruct the coming of his Kingdom, until, through its prevalence, the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ.

In the transporting view of this renovated condition of the world, beheld in vision by the prophet, he, personating the Most High, uttered the language, "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek, and his rest shall be glorious."

May it be our united engagement so to live in conformity with the spirit of the Gospel—so to labor in our separate allotments, in the cause of our Holy Redeemer, as to hasten the coming of this happy day—that at the solemn close of life, when called to account for the occupancy of the talents committed to us, we may be favored to receive the answer of "Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things: I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

Signed in behalf and by the direction of the Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, held in New-York, in the Sixth Month, 1852.

RICHARD CARPENTER, *Clerk.*